

# SUSTAINABILITY #10

## IMS LUXEMBOURG MAG



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photo : Sophie Margue

TRIBUNE

# Rachel Reckinger

## Some Reflections on the Resilience of Luxembourg's Food System

### Réflexions sur la résilience du système alimentaire luxembourgeois

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Moments of crisis like the current one sparked by Covid-19 engage social, economic, cultural and political institutions of a society, and stress-test their resilience. In such times of upheaval, individual and collective food supplies become primary concerns. How resilient is Luxembourg's food system when international supply chains are disrupted? Which vulnerabilities transpire, even in the wealthiest of Western European food-secure countries? The rapidity with which borders closed, even inside the Schengen space, draws focus to national performances and the question of food sovereignty.

Food sovereignty is characterised by the largest possible diversity of locally produced food, and by the highest degree of autonomy possible from international imports and transportation through local options, in a context of food democracy ensuring equity and participation.

Luxembourg is predominantly a grassland region, lending itself to cattle grazing – only ruminants can make grass 'edible' to humans – even though a remarkable diversity and density of vegetable production is possible on comparably small surfaces, but requires higher workforce

and watering infrastructure. Agroforestry (combined crops between trees, pasture and domesticated animals) is still rare in the territory. In terms of food self-supply ratio, Luxembourg produces 114% of its beef needs, 99% of milk, 67% of pork, but only 35% of eggs, 3-5% of vegetables, 1,4% of chicken and less than 1% of fruits. As for processed foods, the vast majority of goods are imported. Though this is changing, the processing system today falls short of national demand.

As a small country, Luxembourg would be suitable for shorter supply chains and could adapt to changing circumstances, but only if the food supply is steady and diverse. On the one hand, small producers experience fluctuation and cannot consistently guarantee supply to corporate clients. But cooperative-run platforms or food hubs grouping a number of small producers could function as a one-stop-shop for wholesalers. On the other hand, larger companies in Luxembourg already offer commercial partnerships to national producers who agree to invest in missing products or production lines, but these initiatives would benefit from a market stretching across the Greater Region and beyond – going beyond nationalistic





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and protectionist understandings of regionality. Current research shows that apart from fish, chicken and tomatoes, all product categories are already being produced in sufficient quantity in the Greater Region to surpass the Greater Region's out-of-home-catering sector's needs. Yet, only a minority of these products are currently served locally – indicating that food sovereignty is mostly a logistic and political issue of supply chain management, market orientation, price policies and national legislative regulations.

Experts also point to the need for an agricultural model based on diversified agroecological systems, reducing external input, optimising biodiversity and stimulating interactions between different species as part of holistic strategies to build long-term fertility and secure livelihoods. Yet, Luxembourg lacks the labour capacity for such a transition to more resilient systems, where knowledge-pooling is key. If there were more market incentives and political warranties for farmers, such undertakings would be less risky.

As high-quality, ethical and sustainable local food is made available and becomes the norm, consumers will develop more sensitivity for local contingencies, ethical and high-quality, organic food,

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"Food sovereignty is mostly a logistic and political issue of supply chain management, market orientation, price policies and national legislative regulations"

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seasonality, etc. State-run labels that certify various types of quality enhance food literacy and more sustainable purchases within private households or procurement behaviour among public buyers, only if they are transparent about added value and backed by laws that make such criteria mandatory. Thus, stringent and encompassing governmental action of democratic and accountable governments could act as a lever in transitions to more resilient and sustainable food systems. Such conditions are then ideal for a deliberate shift towards effective multi-level governance of food systems. Social movements, entrepreneurs and civil society can innovate and bloom. As success grows, emerging local food initiatives can move in from the margins and engage with formal legislative processes at national and EU level. A Common Food Policy could prioritise ethical and sustainable experimentation through complementary actions and coherent food policies at EU, national, and local levels. Food Policy Councils are recognised innovative and efficient tools for multi-scale food policy and governance.

To meet these challenges, Luxembourg is currently founding the first Food Policy Council on a national level, as a multi-stakeholder platform for independent cooperation among equal partners from the three sectors of Luxembourg's food system: policy and administration; research and civil society; production, transformation, gastronomy and trade. This initiative aims to serve a system that is socially just, ecologically regenerative, economically localised and engaging a wide range of actors. It seeks to ensure high-quality, ethical and sustainable food security for its entire population by shortening supply chains in a (trans)regionalised and cooperative way.

Food sovereignty is thus increasingly based on local diversification, innovation, and collective learning processes. Because of its small size and its unique multi-cultural population, Luxembourg can provide a favourable site for experimentation with sustainable innovations at local or transregional levels and build a multi-stakeholder-lead effective food policy. It then can use its political and economic international weight to push best practices forward. ◀

*For more details, check out <https://food.uni.lu>*

Les moments de crise, comme celui déclenché par la pandémie de la Covid-19, engagent les institutions sociales, économiques, culturelles et politiques d'une société, et mettent à l'épreuve leur résilience. En ces temps de turbulences, l'approvisionnement alimentaire individuel et collectif devient une préoccupation majeure. Quelle est la résilience du système alimentaire luxembourgeois lorsque les chaînes d'approvisionnement internationales sont perturbées ? Quelles sont les

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vulnérabilités qui se manifestent, même dans les pays les plus riches d'Europe de l'Ouest, dont la sécurité alimentaire est assurée ? La rapidité avec laquelle les frontières ont été fermées, même à l'intérieur de l'espace Schengen, attire l'attention sur les performances nationales et la question de la souveraineté alimentaire.

La souveraineté alimentaire se caractérise par la plus grande diversité possible d'aliments produits localement, et par le plus haut degré d'autonomie vis-à-vis des importations et du transport en provenance de l'étranger, dans un contexte de démocratie alimentaire assurant équité et participation.

Le Luxembourg est essentiellement une région de prés qui se prête au pâturage du bétail – seuls les ruminants peuvent rendre l'herbe "comestible" pour l'homme –, même si une diversité et une densité remarquables de productions végétales sont aussi possibles sur des surfaces comparativement limitées, nécessitant cependant une main-d'œuvre plus importante et des infrastructures d'arrosage. L'agroforesterie (cultures combinées entre arbres, pâturages et animaux domestiqués) est encore rare sur le territoire. En termes de ratio d'auto-suffisance alimentaire, le Luxembourg produit 114 % de ses besoins en viande bovine, 99 % des besoins en lait, 67 % des besoins en viande porcine, mais seulement 35 % des besoins en œufs, 3-5 % pour les légumes, 1,4 % pour les poulets et moins de 1 % pour les fruits. Concernant les aliments transformés, la grande majorité des marchandises est importée. Bien que la situation évolue, le système de la transformation ne couvre aujourd'hui pas la demande nationale.

En tant que petit pays, le Luxembourg serait en mesure de mettre en place des chaînes d'approvisionnement plus courtes et pourrait s'adapter à des circonstances changeantes, mais uniquement à condition que l'approvisionnement alimentaire soit stable et diversifié.

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decompartmentalise and collaboratively develop economic sectors that have until now been organised according to a logic of vertical silos. At the national and transregional levels, the idea is to implement a holistic, federative and solidarity-based strategy to achieve food sovereignty and promote contiguous consumption. We are talking here about producing, processing, distributing, consuming and recycling food on the basis of a saving interdependence for Man and the planet. In short, a resilient food system for tomorrow.

Experts see us coming: it is the local distribution network concept. And to promote this way of consuming, many initiatives are germinating and growing in Luxembourg.

Young and old can, for example, become producer-consumers or "prosumers". That is to say, to get involved in a community garden that they will find near their home thanks to the portal of the vegetable gardens in Luxembourg Eise Gaart or to create their own plantation at home. And why not also deepen their knowledge of permaculture at school or in training? For those who don't have a green thumb, don't worry. It is possible to become a member of a cooperative such as AlterCoop or to promote the purchase of local products thanks to the Solawi solidarity agriculture network or the Supermiro platform. In addition to reducing food kilometers of products, all these initiatives share other

common points: they create social ties and diversify production sources and exchanges.

Did you know? It is estimated that 15 to 20% of the world's food production is currently grown in cities and communities. (Strategic Study "Third Industrial Revolution Lëtzebuerg", 2016)

Less packaging, fewer emissions, less food waste, more transparency, more trust. Economic players are increasingly mobilising around these issues. And the Luxembourg landscape is beginning to draw new synergies for models combining positive socio-ecological impacts and economic dynamism. This is the case, for example, of the Pall Center and LuxAir, which promote partnerships with local suppliers, or Sources Rosport, which chooses not to export its products and selects its suppliers of raw materials based on their proximity to the production site.

On the political side, the Luxembourg Government is also in favour of a more locavore diet. It is, therefore, taking several steps to make progress in this direction. To cite a few of them retrospectively, there is first of all the strategic study of the third industrial revolution (TIR) carried out in 2016 and including a section dedicated to the future of food for the Grand Duchy with various ambitious strategic measures. Two years later, in January 2018, the country proceeded to overhaul the territorial development programme (PDAT).

When citizens were invited to participate in the process, their demands were clear: quality food, optimal use of resources and sustainable agriculture. More recently, in June 2020, the Minister of Agriculture, Viticulture and Rural Development, Romain Schneider, presented a stimulus package for agriculture with an overall budget of 5 million euros. During his announcement, the Minister then recalled that "the pandemic will have had a positive effect: that of raising awareness of the work of farmers in the food chain, of the true qualitative value of their products, and of the dangers of over-dependence on food from abroad". It is with this awareness that the stimulus package is particularly committed to the diversification of quality local agricultural products distributed within short circuits.

With regard to future prospects for the territory, Luxembourg also seems to be betting on innovation, since it is the first to set up a Food Council at the national level and an Urban Farming strategy aimed at making Luxembourg's towns and cities real food contributors. These are all promising initiatives to respond to a growing need to reconnect with the land that feeds us and to shorten the links - and the kilometres - that exist from the barn to the table.

Did you know? Luxembourg has set itself a production target of 20% of its food needs by 2030. (Stratégie Nationale Urban Farming Luxembourg, 2019). ◀

**Tribune Rachel Reckinger**

## Réflexions sur la résilience du système alimentaire luxembourgeois

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D'un côté, les petits producteurs connaissent des fluctuations et ne peuvent garantir de manière constante l'approvisionnement des entreprises clientes. Pour contourner cet obstacle, des plateformes gérées par des coopératives ou des centres alimentaires (food hubs) regroupant un certain nombre

de petits exploitants agricoles pourraient fonctionner comme un guichet unique pour les grossistes. De l'autre côté, de grandes entreprises luxembourgeoises proposent déjà des partenariats commerciaux aux producteurs du territoire qui acceptent d'investir dans les produits ou les lignes de production manquantes, mais ces

initiatives bénéficieraient d'un marché étendu à toute la Grande Région et au-delà – dépassant les conceptions nationalistes et protectionnistes de la régionalité. Des recherches actuelles montrent en effet qu'à part le poisson, le poulet et les tomates, toutes les catégories d'aliments sont déjà produites en quantité suffisante

en Grande Région pour dépasser les besoins du secteur de la restauration de la Grande Région. Pourtant, seule une minorité de ces produits sont actuellement servis localement – ce qui indique que la souveraineté alimentaire est principalement une question logistique et politique de gestion de la chaîne d'approvisionnement, d'orientation du marché, de fixation de prix et de réglementations législatives nationales.

Les experts soulignent aussi la nécessité d'un modèle agricole basé sur des systèmes agroécologiques diversifiés, réduisant les intrants externes, optimisant la biodiversité et stimulant les interactions entre les différentes espèces dans le cadre de stratégies holistiques visant à établir une fertilité à long terme et des moyens de subsistance sûrs. Or, le Luxembourg ne dispose pas d'une force de travail en assez grand nombre pour une telle transition vers des systèmes plus résistants, où la mise en commun des connaissances est essentielle. S'il y avait davantage d'incitations du marché et de garanties politiques pour les agriculteurs, ce choix d'orientation professionnelle représenterait moins de risques.

À mesure que des aliments locaux de qualité, éthiques et durables seront disponibles et deviendront la norme, les consommateurs seront plus sensibles aux contingences locales, aux produits éthiques et de qualité, à la consommation d'aliments biologiques, à la saisonnalité, etc.

Les labels publics qui certifient différents types de qualité renforcent des achats plus durables et plus généralement la connaissance des aliments tant au sein des ménages que parmi les acheteurs publics uniquement s'ils sont transparents quant à la valeur ajoutée du produit et soutenus par des lois qui rendent ces critères obligatoires. Ainsi, une action rigoureuse et globale de gouvernements démocratiques et responsables pourrait servir de levier dans la transition vers un système alimentaire plus résilient. De telles conditions constituent la base idéale pour une transition délibérée vers une gouvernance efficace des systèmes alimentaires à plusieurs niveaux où les mouvements sociaux, les entrepreneurs et la société civile peuvent innover et s'épanouir. Au fur et à mesure, les nouvelles initiatives locales en matière d'alimentation pourront ainsi sortir de la marginalité et s'engager dans des processus législatifs formels nationaux et européens. Une Politique Alimentaire Commune pourrait donner la priorité aux expérimentations éthiques et durables à travers des actions complémentaires et des politiques alimentaires cohérentes aux niveaux européen, national et local. Les Conseils de Politique Alimentaire (Food Policy Councils) sont des outils innovants reconnus pour favoriser une politique et une gouvernance à plusieurs niveaux.

Afin de relever ces défis, le Luxembourg est actuellement en train de fonder

le premier Food Policy Council au niveau national, en tant que plateforme multipartite pour une coopération indépendante entre des partenaires égaux issus des trois secteurs du système alimentaire luxembourgeois : politique et administration ; recherche et société civile ; production, transformation, gastronomie et commerce. Cette initiative s'inscrit dans un système alimentaire qui aurait comme but d'être socialement juste, écologiquement régénérateur, économiquement localisé et engageant un large éventail d'acteurs. Il vise à assurer une sécurité alimentaire de qualité, éthique et durable pour l'ensemble de la population, en raccourcissant les chaînes d'approvisionnement de manière (trans) régionalisée et coopérative.

La souveraineté alimentaire repose ainsi de plus en plus sur la diversification locale, l'innovation et les processus d'apprentissage collectif. En raison de sa petite taille et de sa population multiculturelle unique, le Luxembourg peut offrir un site favorable à l'expérimentation d'innovations durables au niveau local ou transrégional et mettre en place une politique alimentaire efficace dirigée par plusieurs parties prenantes. Le pays pourra ensuite utiliser son poids politique et économique international pour faire circuler ses bonnes pratiques. ◀

*Pour plus de détails, voir <https://food.uni.lu>*

## Damaged Soil Regenerative Agriculture to the Rescue

*Translated from page 70*

### **Regenerative agriculture, what exactly is it about?**

First and foremost, regenerative agriculture is the preservation or revitalisation of soil fertility. And this is very necessary because rich soils are essential to grow healthy food and prevent droughts or floods. Above all, soils are a key ally in the reduction and

adaptation to climate change. Discreetly, they sequester an astronomical amount of CO<sub>2</sub>, preventing it from escaping into our atmosphere. These are little-known facts, but soils are home to a quarter of the world's biological diversity and sequester more CO<sub>2</sub> than the earth's vegetation and atmosphere combined. 1,417 petatons, or 1,417,10<sup>15</sup> tonnes, according to FAO. And

that is only in the first metre of soil depth! Unfortunately, current practices based on linear land use management, deforestation, compaction and pressure on resources are leading to erosion and critical depletion of nutrients in the land. The same is true for extensive cultivation, eradication of organic matter, intensive irrigation with poor quality water and overuse of inputs,

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